



**northeast**  
secondary education  
committee

# Investigating Secondary Schools

## Read This Before You Decide

We want you to identify the indicators of quality and to investigate secondary schools fully, before you decide where to enrol your child for secondary school.

Consider all secondary schools including your local co-ed, single sex, religious, immersion and other schools.

**School Open Nights** are a great opportunity to ask questions and to get your own feeling for a school. We recommend visiting secondary school open nights in both Year 7 and Year 8. Your child's personal impression at the school is valuable.

Visit at least two secondary schools so you can compare one to another. The popularity of any school may not be based on reasons that are important to you, or your child.

**Questions to ask.** The following questions are designed to give you the confidence to know what to look for in a secondary school, why this is important and what this might look like at a school.

Questions to ask	Why is this important?	What does this look like?
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<b>Parents and Whānau</b>		
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<p>Does the school value parent input and pay attention to your preferences?</p> <p>Is the school interested in your child's educational progress and general well-being?</p> <p>Is it easy to access information?</p>	<p>Students achieve greater success when parents and whanau are welcome at school and are interested in supporting student learning.</p> <p>Schools benefit greatly from the knowledge and experience of parents, whānau and members of the community.</p>	<p>The prospectus answers most of your questions. Comprehensive information is given on the open night. Your questions are answered fully.</p> <p>Frequent newsletters.</p> <p>Parent-teacher-student conferences.</p> <p>Direct access to contact teachers.</p> <p>Invitations to assemblies and events during the year.</p>
<p>How is student progress reported to parents?</p>	<p>Regular reports identify the need to get help if your child is struggling in their learning.</p>	<p>Regular reports and test results are sent to parents or available online. Parents can contact teachers at any time.</p>

<b>Inclusiveness</b>		
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<p>Is your own culture visible in the school?</p> <p>Is the school inclusive, open and welcoming to all families and students no matter their back ground?</p> <p>How are Te Reo and Tikanga Maori immersed into the school curriculum?</p> <p>What processes are in place to help develop skills in students with different learning abilities including gifted, mainstreamed learning support, ESOL and other inclusive practices?</p>	<p>Students need to identify with their own culture. They need to feel comfortable with other cultures.</p> <p>Students from all backgrounds should feel able to participate in learning.</p> <p>Schools that remove barriers for students achieve greater all round student success.</p>	<p>The school uniform supports students' culture, religion and gender preferences.</p> <p>There are well developed teaching and learning strategies for all learners.</p> <p>Te Reo and Tikanga Maori are evident in the school décor and in conversation.</p> <p>Te Reo is used across all subjects.</p> <p>Cultural diversity is supported with school administration information.</p> <p>Key documents available in other languages.</p>
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## Subjects and Curriculum

<p>What are the compulsory subjects?</p> <p>What are the optional elective subjects?</p> <p>Does the school offer the subjects your child is interested in through to Y13?</p> <p>What opportunities are there for students to engage in extra-curricular learning?</p>	<p>Students should be able to learn what they need for their intended career path through their secondary school.</p> <p>Students should be able to study a subject through to year 13. There should also be subjects they can pick up at senior level.</p>	<p>Some schools have Y9 students experience a range of optional subjects before choosing subjects to study in Y10.</p> <p>Smaller schools with fewer elective subjects may have initiatives that extend options to students including correspondence, Skype learning and flexible learning times.</p>
<p>Is enough information given to plan a learning pathway from Y9 to Y13?</p> <p>Are students given course outlines at the start of each course?</p>	<p>Students can envisage their learning path and develop personal goals.</p>	<p>Information is given to students at the beginning of each year.</p> <p>The school career advisor works with students to develop career options.</p>
<p>Is there a focus on students being life-long learners or only on learning to achieve the standard qualifications?</p> <p>Are there opportunities for integrated curriculum projects or events where students can combine all their learning?</p> <p>Does the school foster and facilitate individual student interests?</p>	<p>Integrated learning involving student interests supports academic achievements and well-being.</p> <p>Employers look for students with developed personal strengths as much as their formal qualifications.</p> <p>Students with diverse interests understand more from school learning.</p>	<p>The school uses collective curiosity, intelligence, inquiry and critical thinking to engage all learners in meaningful learning.</p> <p>Students are encouraged to develop self-management, problem solving and communication skills.</p> <p>Student skills are used in school events and activities.</p>
<p>Are students aware of what they need to achieve in each subject for NCEA or other qualifications?</p> <p>Is there a range of qualifications and career paths available to the students?</p>	<p>Students who plan their learning are more likely to succeed. Not all students will gain academic qualifications. Schools need to support these students to find other opportunities to achieve their full potential.</p>	<p>Schools promote a variety of career pathways and options to extend learning through outside agencies.</p>

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<b>Enrolling</b>		
<p>What is the school enrolment scheme?</p> <p>Do you live in the school enrolment zone?</p> <p>Will this school accept any out of zone students?</p> <p>Will the school's zone change? When is the next review?</p>	<p>Primary and intermediate school students should know which school they are able to attend in zone. This helps them plan their future education.</p>	<p>Schools should provide clear information about their zone boundaries.</p> <p>There is a well-defined enrolment process with dates.</p> <p>The ballot process for out of zone applications is clear.</p>

<b>Learning Environment</b>		
<p>Does the school have interesting equipment and materials in all classrooms?</p>	<p>Innovative thinking and problem solving skills are valued by employers.</p>	<p>Students are interested, stimulated and challenged by their learning.</p>
<p>Do the school grounds offer spaces for different activities?</p>	<p>The school buildings and grounds provide spaces for activity, sports and relaxation.</p>	<p>Outdoor gathering spaces with shade and shelter as well as areas for outside activities and sports.</p>
<p>Is the class environment clean, healthy and flexible?</p> <p>How are classrooms heated and cooled?</p>	<p>The classroom environment influences student productivity. Students need to be comfortable to focus and learn well.</p>	<p>The school has good heating, ventilation and natural light.</p> <p>Rooms are spacious and flexible.</p>

<b>Leadership</b>		
<p>How are Y9 students involved in leadership roles in the school?</p>	<p>Students feel valued when schools give them roles in decision making.</p> <p>Leadership skills build confidence and are highly valued by employers.</p>	<p>Y9 students and Senior students regularly interact and work together.</p> <p>Y9 students are involved in planning and decision making within the school.</p>

### Student Well Being

<p>Are there good relationships between staff and students?</p>	<p>Asking questions and asking for help is easier when the teacher and student relationship is based on mutual respect. Greater learning occurs when curiosity is encouraged.</p>	<p>Interactions with teachers are fair, fun and responsive. Music, productions, festivals, celebrations, traditions and student lead initiatives are regular school events.</p>
<p>How does the school ensure students are safe and happy? Are there times when the students of all ages mix together for activities?</p>	<p>Schools that strengthen relationships between all age levels develop a stronger community.</p>	<p>Deans and counsellors are available at known times. Health nurses and youth workers are at school regularly. The school structure encourages students to get to know students at other age levels.</p>
<p>Is there evidence that the school is opposed to bullying and violence? How does the school promote positive behaviour?</p>	<p>The required standard of student behaviour needs to be established at the start of Y9. Unacceptable behaviour is not tolerated.</p>	<p>Considerate non-violent behaviour is actively promoted. Behaviour management systems are in place. All students know how to access adults who can help them.</p>
<p>What is the school roll size? Will your child feel confident &amp; comfortable in a school this size? What can your family do to strengthen the relationship with the school before your child starts secondary school?</p>	<p>Students who feel they belong at a school are more likely to reach their full potential. Some students prefer a smaller school, while others enjoy a larger school.</p>	<p>Students are content and comfortable at their school. Visit the school for an event. Talk to current students. Make time to read the school's latest ERO report.</p>
<p>What transition activities does the school undertake to smooth student transition to secondary school?</p>	<p>Students are more confident at secondary school following a positive transition from their primary or intermediate school.</p>	<p>Primary and secondary schools have a programme of activities to help students transition to secondary school.</p>

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<b>Transport to school</b>		
<p>Does the school promote the use of public and active transport? How many under cover bike stands are there? Will a skateboard fit in a school locker?</p>	<p>Buses cost about \$500 per year using a Metro card. Schools should encourage students to bike, scoot or walk to school. Independent transport empowers students to participate in extra-curricular activities.</p>	<p>The school website shows maps of bus routes and safe walking and cycling routes to school. The school provides secure bike stands, lockers &amp; places to hang wet jackets and helmets. The school uniform enables both boys and girls to travel by bike.</p>

<b>Sports and Clubs</b>		
<p>What extra-curricular activities are available? Are there enough school groups or teams to include my child, or should they join a local club to continue their sport or interests? Do school timetables and homework allow students enough time to continue their sport or interests?</p>	<p>Extra-curricular learning broadens student experience and benefits their learning. Participating in sport into adulthood has long term health benefits. Hobbies, interests and sports create opportunities and support new friendships.</p>	<p>The school calendar includes music events, productions, festivals, celebrations, traditions and other student lead initiatives. Students are encouraged to participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Sports are available in both competitive and social grades.</p>

<b>Cost</b>		
<p>What fees are requested? Which subjects have additional costs? What are the fees for music lessons, sport and other extra activities?</p>	<p>Parents should be able to gather enough information to predict the whole cost of an average year at the school including extracurricular activities.</p>	<p>Fees and donations are clearly defined. Subject costs and workbook fees are clear. The school uniform is affordable to buy and maintain. Sport fees and any sports uniform costs are known.</p>

### **Information and Communication Technology (ICT)**

<p>Will students participate in a wide range of ICT activities?                  What device do I need to provide for my child?                  Are smart phones allowed in class?</p>	<p>ICT is a strong component of most career and education pathways.                  Different devices and systems are preferred by each school, each with differing costs.</p>	<p>Students have access to modern digital resources and learn to use them responsively.                  The school has clear practical rules about using devices.                  Device use is monitored and device-free time is scheduled.                  Some schools have loan or rent to own devices available.</p>
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### **Board of Trustees**

<p>Is the Board of Trustees visible at the school?</p>	<p>The Board Trustees decide governance matters. The Principal and school leadership team oversee school management.</p>	<p>Board members attend school functions.                  The Board regularly communicates its work and decisions.</p>
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### **Emergency**

<p>What are the school's emergency procedures?                  Can you get to the school from home or work easily?</p>	<p>Students need to get home or meet up with their family quickly after an emergency.</p>	<p>The school is near your home, workplace or on the way home from work.</p>
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### **Transition to Work, Education and Training**

<p>How does the school prepare students to finish school?                  What programmes are in place to transition students to tertiary education, training or into the work force?</p>	<p>Students need strong support and guidance. They also need support if their career path needs to change, which may be after they have formally left school.</p>	<p>Career advisors develop a pathway for all students. Gateway, work experience, visiting places of tertiary study and scholarship opportunities are promoted to students.                  Dual programmes are offered where students are enrolled both at school and an outside course.</p>
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<b>School Retention Rate</b>		
<p>Does the school have a good retention rate? How does this school compare to others? What explanations does the school give for low student numbers in Y12 and Y13?</p>	<p>Students who lose interest in learning or who are not succeeding academically can drift away from school with no qualifications. Some students will need to explore alternative career pathways. All students should leave school able to work and earn a regular income.</p>	<p>Schools should retain most of their students until they finish Y13 or move on to work, training or tertiary study. The number of students taken in at Y9 should not be significantly reduced by Y13.</p>

<b>Support</b>		
<p>Does your child require extra support for their learning needs? Is there a staff member for you to talk to about ORS funding?</p>	<p>Secondary schools should accommodate all learners. Some students will benefit from additional assistance.</p>	<p>Someone is available to speak to about funding at the open night and to help transition your child. Further information is available from the school.</p>



The North East Secondary Education Committee advocates for families on secondary education issues. We want every student to reach their full potential. Find out more about our achievements and current issues at:-

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